The Winnowing Fan

By Laurence Binyon

THE NEW POETRY SERIES

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THE WINNOWING-FAN

BY THE SAME WRITER

ODES
LONDON VISIONS
ENGLAND AND OTHER POEMS
ETC.

THE WINNOWING-FAN: POEMS ON THE GREAT WAR

BY LAURENCE BINYON

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE FOURTH OF AUGUST	9
STRANGE FRUIT	11
THE NEW IDOL	13
THE HARVEST	14
TO THE BELGIANS	15
LOUVAIN	18
TO GOETHE	20
AT RHEIMS	22
TO THE ENEMY COMPLAINING	25
TO WOMEN	26
FOR THE FALLEN	28
ODE FOR SEPTEMBER	30

THE FOURTH OF AUGUST

Now in thy splendour go before us,
Spirit of England, ardent-eyed,
Enkindle this dear earth that bore us,
In the hour of peril purified.

The cares we hugged drop out of vision,
Our hearts with deeper thoughts dilate.
We step from days of sour division
Into the grandeur of our fate.

For us the glorious dead have striven,
They battled that we might be free.
We to their living cause are given ;
We arm for men that are to be.

Among the nations nobliest chartered,
England recalls her heritage.
In her is that which is not bartered,
Which force can neither quell nor cage.

For her immortal stars are burning
With her the hope that's never done,
The seed that's in the Spring's returning,
The very flower that seeks the sun.

She fights the fraud that feeds desire on
Lies, in a lust to enslave or kill,
The barren creed of blood and iron,
Vampire of Europe's wasted will . . .

Endure, O Earth! and thou, awaken,
Purged by this dreadful winnowing-fan,
O wronged, untameable, unshaken
Soul of divinely suffering man.

STRANGE FRUIT

THIS year the grain is heavy-ripe ;
The apple shows a ruddier stripe ;
Never berries so profuse
Blackened with so sweet a juice
On brambly hedges, summer-dyed.
The yellow leaves begin to glide ;
But Earth in careless lap-ful treasures
Pledge of over-brimming measures,
As if some rich unwonted zest
Stirred prodigal within her breast.
And now, while plenty's left uncared,
The fruit unplucked, the sickle spared,
Where men go forth to waste and spill,
Toiling to burn, destroy, and kill,
Lo, also side by side with these
Beast-hungers, ravening miseries,
The heart of man has brought to birth
Splendours richer than his earth.
Now in the thunder-hour of fate
Each one is kinder to his mate ;
The surly smile ; the hard forbear ;
There's help and hope for all to share ;

And sudden visions of goodwill
Transcending all the scope of ill
Like a glory of rare weather
Link us in common light together,
A clearness of the cleansing sun,
Where none's alone and all are one ;
And touching each a priceless pain
We find our own true hearts again.
No more the easy masks deceive :
We give, we dare, and we believe.

THE NEW IDOL

MAGNIFICENT the Beast! Look in the eyes
Of the fell tiger towering on his prey,
Beautiful in his power to pounce and slay
And effortless in action. He denies
All but himself. He gloats on his weak prize,
Roaring the anger of wild breath at bay,
Blank anger like an element whose way
Is mere annihilation! Terrible eyes!

But there is one more to be feared, who can
Escape the prison of his own wrath; whose will
Lives beyond life; who smiles with quiet lips;
Most terrible because most tender, Man,—
Not only uncowed but irresistible
When the cause fires him to the finger-tips.

THE HARVEST

Red reapers under these sad August skies,
Proud War-Lords, careless of ten thousand dead,
Who leave earth's kindly crops unharvested
As you have left the kindness of the wise
For brutal menace and for clumsy lies,
The spawn of insolence by bragging fed,
With power and fraud in faith's and honour's stead,
Accounting these but good stupidities ;

You reap a heavier harvest than you know.
Disnaturing a nation, you have thieved
Her name, her patient genius, while you thought
To fool the world and master it. You sought
Reality. It comes in hate and woe.
In the end you also shall not be deceived.

TO THE BELGIANS

O RACE that Cæsar knew,
That won stern Roman praise,
What land not envies you
The laurel of these days ?

You built your cities rich
Around each towered hall,—
Without, the statued niche,
Within, the pictured wall.

Your ship-thronged wharves, your marts
With gorgeous Venice vied.
Peace and her famous arts
Were yours : though tide on tide

Of Europe's battle scourged
Black field and reddened soil,
From blood and smoke emerged
Peace and her fruitful toil.

Yet when the challenge rang,
"The War-Lord comes; give room!"
Fearless to arms you sprang
Against the odds of doom.

Like your own Damian
Who sought that lepers' isle
To die a simple man
For men with tranquil smile,

So strong in faith you dared
Defy the giant, scorn
Ignobly to be spared,
Though trampled, spoiled, and torn,

And in your faith arose
And smote, and smote again,
Till those astonished foes
Reeled from their mounds of slain,

The faith that the free soul,
Untaught by force to quail,
Through fire and dirge and dole
Prevails and shall prevail.

Still for your frontier stands
The host that knew no dread,
Your little, stubborn land's
Nameless, immortal dead.

LOUVAIN

To Dom Bruno Destrée, O.S.B.

I

It was the very heart of Peace that thrilled
In the deep minster-bell's wide-throbbing sound
When over old roofs evening seemed to build
Security this world has never found.

Your cloister looked from Cæsar's rampart, high
O'er the fair city : clustered orchard-trees
Married their murmur with the dreaming sky.
It was the house of love and living peace.

And there we talked of youth's delightful years
In Italy, in England. Now, O Friend,
I know not if I speak to living ears
Or if upon you too is come the end.

Peace is on Louvain ; dead peace of spilt blood
Upon the mounded ashes where she stood.

II

But from that blood, those ashes there arose
Not hoped-for terror cowering as it ran,
But divine anger flaming upon those
Defamers of the very name of man,

Abortions of their blind hyena-creed,
Who for " protection " of their battle-host
Against the unarmed of them they had made to bleed,
Whose hearts they had tortured to the uttermost

Without a cause, past pardon, fired and tore
The towers of fame and beauty, while they shot
And butchered the defenceless in the door.
But History shall hang them high, to rot

Unburied, in the face of times unborn,
Mankind's abomination and last scorn.

TO GOETHE

GOETHE, who saw and who foretold
  A world revealed
New-springing from its ashes old
  On Valmy field,

When Prussia's sullen hosts retired
  Before the advance
Of ragged, starved, but freedom-fired
  Soldiers of France ;

If still those clear, Olympian eyes
  Through smoke and rage
Your ancient Europe scrutinize,
  What think you, Sage ?

Are these the armies of the Light
  That seek to drown
The light of lands where freedom's fight
  Has won renown ?

Will they blot also out your name
  Because you praise
All works of men that shrine the flame
  Of beauty's ways,

Wherever men have proved them great,
  Nor, drunk with pride,
Saw but a single swollen State
  And naught beside,

Nor dreamed of drilling Europe's mind
  With threat and blow
The way professors have designed
  Genius should go ?

Or shall a people rise at length
  And see and shake
The fetters from its giant strength,
  And grandly break

This pedantry of feud and force
  To man untrue
Thundering and blundering on its course
  To death and rue ?

AT RHEIMS

THEIR hearts were burning in their breasts
  Too hot for curse or cries.
They stared upon the towers that burned
  Before their smarting eyes.

There where, since France began to be,
  Anointed kings knelt down,
There where the Maid, the unafraid,
  Received her vision's crown,

The senseless shell with nightmare scream
  Burst, and fair fragments fell
Torn from their centuries of peace
  As by the rage of hell.

What help for wrath, what use for wail ?
  Before a dumb despair
All ancient, high, heroic France
  Seemed burning, bleeding there.

. . . . .

Within, the pillars soar to gloom
  Lit by the glimmering Rose ;
Spirits of beauty shrined in stone
  Afar from mortal woes,

Hearing not, though their haunted shade
  Is stricken, and all around
With splintering flash and brutal crash
  The ghostly aisles resound.

And there, upon the pavement stretched,
  The German wounded groan
To see the dropping flames of death
  And feel the shells their own.

Too fierce the fire ! Helped by their foes
  They stagger out to air.
The green-gray coats are seen, are known
  Through all the crowded square.

. . . . .

Ah, now for vengeance ! Deep the groan :
  A death-knell ! Quietly
Soldiers unsling their rifles, lift
  And aim with steady eye.

But sudden in the hush between
  Death and the doomed, there stands
Against those levelled guns a priest,
  Gentle, with outstretched hands.

Be not as guilty as they ! he cries . . .
  Each lets his weapon fall,
As if a vision showed him France
  And vengeance vain and small.

TO THE ENEMY COMPLAINING

Be ruthless, then ; scorn slaves of scruple ; avow
The blow, planned with such patience, that you deal
So terribly ; hack on, and care not how
The innocent fall ; live out your faith of steel.

Then you speak speech that we can comprehend.
It cries from the unpitied blood you spill.
And so we stand against you, and to the end
Flame as one man, the weapon of one will.

But when your lips usurp the loyal phrase
Of honour, querulously voluble
Of " chivalry " and " kindness," and you praise
What you despise for weakness of the fool,

Then the gorge rises. Bleat to dupe the dead !
The wolf beneath the sheepskin drips too red.

TO WOMEN

YOUR hearts are lifted up, your hearts
That have foreknown the utter price.
Your hearts burn upward like a flame
Of splendour and of sacrifice.

For you, you too, to battle go,
Not with the marching drums and cheers
But in the watch of solitude
And through the boundless night of fears.

Swift, swifter than those hawks of war,
Those threatening wings that pulse the air,
Far as the vanward ranks are set,
You are gone before them, you are there!

And not a shot comes blind with death
And not a stab of steel is pressed
Home, but invisibly it tore
And entered first a woman's breast.

Amid the thunder of the guns,
The lightnings of the lance and sword
Your hope, your dread, your throbbing pride,
Your infinite passion is outpoured

From hearts that are as one high heart
Withholding naught from doom and bale
Burningly offered up,—to bleed,
To bear, to break, but not to fail!

FOR THE FALLEN

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow
old :
Age shall not weary them, nor the years con-
demn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades
again ;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home ;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time ;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes pro-
found,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they
are known
As the stars are known to the Night ;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are
dust
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
As the stars that are starry in the time of our
darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.

ODE FOR SEPTEMBER

I

On that long day when England held her breath,
Suddenly gripped at heart
And called to choose her part
Between her loyal soul and luring sophistries,
We watched the wide, green-bosomed land beneath
Driven and tumultuous skies ;
We watched the volley of white shower after shower
Desolate with fierce drops the fallen flower ;
And still the rain's retreat
Drew glory on its track,
And still, when all was darkness and defeat,
Upon dissolving cloud the bow of peace shone back.
So in our hearts was alternating beat,
With very dread elate ;
And Earth dyed all her day in colours of our fate.

II

But oh, how faint the image we foretold
In fancies of our fear
Now that the truth is here!
And we awake from dream yet think it still a dream.
It bursts our thoughts with more than thought can hold;
And more than human seem
These agonies of conflict; Elements
At war! yet not with vast indifference
Casually crushing; nay,
It is as if were hurled
Lightnings that murdered, seeking out their prey;
As if an earthquake shook to chaos half the world,
Equal in purpose as in power to slay;
And thunder stunned our ears
Streaming in rain of blood on torrents that are tears.

III

Around a planet rolls the drum's alarm.
Far where the summer smiles
Upon the utmost isles,
Danger is treading silent as a fever-breath.
Now in the North the secret waters arm ;
Under the wave is Death :
They fight in the very air, the virgin air,
Hovering on fierce wings to the onset : there
Nations to battle stream ;
Earth smokes and cities burn ;
Heaven thickens in a storm of shells that scream;
The long lines shattering break, turn and again
return ;
And still across a continent they teem,
Moving in myriads ; more
Than ranks of flesh and blood, but soul with
soul at war !

IV

All the hells are awake : the old serpents hiss
From dungeons of the mind ;
Fury of hate born blind,
Madness and lust, despairs and treacheries unclean ;
They shudder up from man's most dark abyss.
But there are heavens serene
That answer strength with strength ; they stand secure ;
They arm us from within, and we endure.
Now are the brave more brave,
Now is the cause more dear,
The more the tempests of the darkness rave
As, when the sun goes down, the shining stars are clear.
Radiant the spirit rushes to the grave.
Glorious it is to live
In such an hour, but life is lovelier yet to give.

V

Alas! what comfort for the uncomforted,
Who knew no cause, nor sought
Glory or gain? they are taught,
Homeless in homes that burn, what human hearts can bear.
The children stumble over their dear dead,
Wandering they know not where.
And there is one who simply fights, obeys,
Tramps, till he loses count of nights and days,
Tired, mired in dust and sweat,
Far from his own hearth-stone;
A common man of common earth, and yet
The battle-winner he, a man of no renown,
Where "food for cannon" pays a nation's debt.
This is Earth's hero, whom
The pride of Empire tosses careless to his doom.

VI

Now will we speak, while we have eyes for tears
And fibres to be wrung
And in our mouths a tongue.
We will bear wrongs untold but will not only bear ;
Not only bear, but build through striving years
The answer of our prayer,
That whosoever has the noble name
Of man, shall not be yoked to alien shame ;
That life shall be indeed
Life, not permitted breath
Of spirits wrenched and forced to others' need,
Robbed of their nature's joy and free alone in death,
The world shall travail in that cause, shall bleed,
But deep in hope it dwells
Until the morning break which the long night foretells.

VII

O children filled with your own airy glee
Or with a grief that comes
So swift, so strange, it numbs,
If on your growing youth this page of terror bite,
Harden not then your senses, feel and be
The promise of the light.
O heirs of Man, keep in your hearts not less
The divine torrents of his tenderness!
'Tis ever war: but rust
Grows on the sword; the tale
Of earth is strewn with empires heaped in dust
Because they dreamed that force should punish and prevail.
The will to kindness lives beyond their lust;
Their grandeurs are undone:
Deep, deep within man's soul are all his victories won.

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